

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Testimony of Kevin Kelleher, Publisher, Lone Peak Lookout Publications

Jennifer and Kevin Kelleher Publishers
P.O. 160123
Big Sky, Montana 59716
(406) 995-4133 or FAX: (406) 995-4099

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
HR 3381
Gallatin Land Consolidation Act of 1998
March 24, 1998

Thank you honorable members of the House and citizens concerned about the Gallatin Land Consolidation Act of 1998 for this opportunity to speak in favor of this proposed legislation.

The importance of the Gallatin Land Consolidation Act of 1998 for citizens of the Gallatin Canyon can only be reasonably ascertained by looking back at the grassroots activities that led us to this legislative point. For years the citizens of the Gallatin Canyon have dreamed of consolidating the privately held lands and Forest Service lands into one contiguous block of publicly owned land. This can only be accomplished by trading some public land for private land and private lands for public lands. It also must include an equitable timber harvest quota.

While this may seem like a simple process one has to consider all the variables in valuing land including developmental potential, timber resources, mineral rights, water rights, livestock grazing and habitat value for native species of wildlife and waterfowl. The citizens of the Gallatin Canyon are blessed to live in an area very close to Yellowstone National Park and in a region of largely natural and undisturbed wildlands, both public and private.

The first time I realized that some of these lands could be threatened by subdivision and other development was when I toured the Porcupine Basin on horseback with Graham Taylor in the summer of 1982, the same year we started publication of the LONE PEAK LOOKOUT weekly newspaper in the Gallatin Canyon. Taylor was the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks biologist and he explained that one day these lands could be developed if not protected by public ownership in the near future. At that time the LOOKOUT took an editorial stand to raise public awareness about the threat to these lands and to help facilitate a transfer of these lands to public ownership.

In the summer of 1996 this consolidation of the approximately 8,000 acres of land in the Porcupine drainage was realized in the first half of the Gallatin Range Protection and Consolidation Act of 1993. In this instance

Congress acted for the good of the nation and protected an area critical to elk, deer, moose, grizzly bears and many other native species and more effectively relieved pressure on the border of Yellowstone National Park from further road building and subdivision.

It also halted any resort development sprawl eastward from the nearby Big Sky Resort. Since the Spanish Peaks unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness borders the Big Sky Resort to the north and the Porcupine closed the door to the east, the next critical area to "draw the line" remained in the pristine Taylor Fork drainage almost immediately south of Big Sky. Forest service land to the west partially stopped the westward movement of the Big Sky resort community, but not before a large block of former Plum Creek Timber land was sold to local developers.

The need to protect the Taylor Fork land and the Porcupine land was recognized early on by the efforts of citizens in the Gallatin Canyon who successfully formed two Gallatin County Planning and Zoning Districts. The South Canyon District was created in 1994 while the much larger Gallatin Canyon/Big Sky Planning and Zoning District, on which I serve, was adopted in 1996. Both of these grassroots citizens groups top priority was twofold: First to control development on private land and second to try and preserve open space and acquire additional public land.

The Taylor Fork is probably the most unique and pristine drainage of the West Gallatin River. It's value for wildlife habitat and its value for recreational use has been well documented, but it is important to complete this transaction largely in order to stop further developmental sprawl to the south of Big Sky. If this can be accomplished the survival of our wildlands for generations to come will be realized and those generations to come will certainly look back at these efforts today and realize that this was the finest hour for the preservation and conservation of these lands.

While other lands in the Bridget and Bangtail Mountains will be traded as well as some 20 million board feet of timber in this land exchange it is absolutely essential to look at the big picture for the American people. The preservation of the lands surrounding Yellowstone is essential to the protection of the world's first national park as we move into the next century. The world is a smaller place today that it was in 1872 when Yellowstone Park was dedicated. It is also essential that the development line be drawn to the south of Big Sky, only this will insure that the great wildlife species of the Yellowstone ecosystem have a chance of survival. You must choose to protect the natural winter ranges, calving areas, and migration routes that the great ungulate herds follow and graze on outside Yellowstone National Park.

The procurement of 54,000 acres of BSL land for the public is also brings with it an additional 133 miles of forest roads and another 77 miles of public trails, some across land which will be retained by BSL.

This legislation may not be a perfect fit for all Montanans, but it is a perfectly clear deal for the American people who cherish the heritage and value in preserving the wildest and best of their wildlands. Without action to pass this legislation one of the greatest opportunities to serve for the future will be lost forever.

The citizens of the Gallatin Canyon urge you to adopt this legislation as quickly as possible and preserve the Taylor Fork and procure additional lands for the Gallatin National Forests, one of America's greatest natural resources.

Kevin Kelleher
Publisher

Lone Peak Lookout Publications Inc.,
54725 Gallatin Road
Gallatin Gateway, MT. 59730

#